

PA SHPO Inventories French & Indian War Sites

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In 1754, French seizure of the forks of the Ohio River, where Pittsburgh now stands, initiated a decade of open conflict between Britain and France in North America. Known as an American or colonial phase of the Seven Years' War in Europe, and the French and Indian War in America, it is most properly understood as "the Great War for the Empire." The struggle between European colonizing powers became global in scope, and the eventual outcome had a profound historical impact in many places in the world, including Pennsylvania.

British Major General Edward Braddock's difficult overland campaign to take the Forks from the French in 1755 ended prematurely in a catastrophic ambush which left the entire Pennsylvania frontier physically and psychologically unprotected. The immediate consequences for Pennsylvania were that the Indian allies of the French swiftly redressed the settlers' unjust usurpation of their lands. A bountiful frontier became a theater of terror and desperation. Bloody raids against settlers along the southern valleys and foothills of the Appalachian Mountains sent a panicked exodus of families fleeing to more settled areas east of the Susquehanna River and south of the mountain passes. Displaced angry westerners demanded assistance from the colonial government in Philadelphia, dividing and at length breaking the Quaker oligarchy which had long controlled the government. In the meantime, families on the outskirts of the contracting frontier were left to depend upon their own resources, buoyed only by granting of official commissions to their leaders and occasional provision of swivel guns and gunpowder, until a provincial system of forts was authorized and built.

British government leader William Pitt's commitment to take and secure the Forks of the Ohio had long-term consequences for Pennsylvania. General John Forbes's successful military road campaign of 1758 and Colonel Henry Bouquet's repulse of Chief Pontiac's Rebellion in

1763 ended French and Native American competition with Pennsylvania settlers for the Trans-Appalachian Region and thereby, as well, dependence upon the British government for protection. Also, Forbes Road was a more direct western route than Braddock's, and it fostered predominant settlement of the region by Pennsylvanians rather than by Virginians. Forbes Road served until the Early National Period as the only westward route from central to western PA for the military, packhorse traders, and migrating settlers. It was used as the base route for the Pennsylvania Road, authorized by the State Assembly in 1785, and completed 1789-1790. Both Forbes's and Braddock's Roads were important after the war to the early transportation and settlement patterns of western Pennsylvania and the developing nation beyond.

The physical legacy of the war in Pennsylvania consisted of French and Virginia-built forts and trading centers; privately-fortified Pennsylvania farmsteads, mills, and meeting houses; provincial forts; British camps, redoubts, and engineer-designed forts erected to cut and maintain the road to the Forks; and the roadbeds themselves of Braddock's and Forbes's campaigns. Although scholars

had researched and written about the defense of the Pennsylvania frontier and traced the routes of the military roads, no systematic statewide inventory and mapping of French and Indian War-related sites had been attempted since a study commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Legislature in the late-19th century.

In September 1989, the National Park Service awarded the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's Bureau for Historic

Preservation (the "BHP," Pennsylvania's State Historic Preservation Office) a grant to conduct a special study on French and Indian War resources, with special emphasis upon Braddock's and Forbes's Roads. In 1990-1992, Dr. Louis Waddell, a French and Indian War era scholar with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, prepared a historical context with annotated bibliography for the BHP. This context was used as a principal document for the identification and evaluation of historic resources.

The BHP then drafted a preliminary survey methodology for the identification and evaluation of historic resources, including a universe of anticipated property types: 1) military engagement and fortification sites, 2) military road segments and 3) buildings or standing structures related to the conflict. The preliminary methodology proposed secondary source synthesis, site



Trace of Forbes Road, near Fort Dewart. Photo by the author.

mapping, and limited field survey. The BHP proposed to map as many sites as possible on USGS 7.5 minute series topographical maps. This methodology also proposed a priority index for choosing a small number of sites from the anticipated universe of sites for in-depth survey and evaluation.

When the BHP began to research and map sites in spring 1992, several facts became apparent. The few extant buildings and standing structures with documentable relevance to the conflict tended to have been long-known, well-researched, and already effectively marked, commemorated, or interpreted. The archeological locations of documented military sites, were, on the other hand, numerous, but data on their locations was not readily accessible, precluding their identification and protection under state and national historic preservation legislation. Although some military sites such as Fort Ligonier, in Westmoreland County, had been carefully excavated, reconstructed, and interpreted to the public, other sites were unmarked or had been recently destroyed by land development or strip mining.

Based upon preliminary mapping, many of the sites appeared to have good potential for archeological integrity. The level of data and number of artifacts recovered at Ligonier and other excavations suggested that, under ideal circumstances, French and Indian War period fortification sites had the potential to yield considerable information. Based upon the quantity of sites, the BHP's need for a concise reference document to categorize and provide context for any given site, and the desire to have a readily amendable medium, the BHP decided to develop a computerized inventory.

Using the "Table" function of WordPerfect software (version 5.1), the BHP inventoried a total of 106 sites. The BHP created a separate document or running chart for each historical group who had established the military sites, i.e., "French Forts," "Virginia Forts," "Private Forts," "Provincial Forts" and "British Forts." Broken down by chart, this total included: 24 British forts and related military sites, 4 French forts, 43 private forts, 31 provincial forts and 4 Virginia forts. On each chart the BHP used the following column format of four data categories: 1) fort or site name and page references in principal secondary sources, 2) descriptive notes, 3) site location, and 4) status of the

site in terms of archeological excavation, commemoration, reconstruction, or physical disruption of the site.

Through the synthesis of secondary source material the BHP was able to locate over 60% of the total of 106 sites on USGS maps. Broken down by chart, this amounted to 21 of the 24 British forts, 3 of the 4 French forts, 21 of the 43 private forts, 24 of the 31 provincial forts and 1 of the 4 Virginia forts.

Focusing on Braddock's and Forbes's Roads, the most impressive military road segment that the BHP identified was a four- to five-mile segment of the Forbes Road located in the southwest central part of the state within Bedford and Somerset counties. This segment includes the strategic mountain pass "Rhor's Gap," the clear trace of a deeply-worn road path stretching for over four miles, the surviving earth and stone ramparts of the redoubt "Fort Dewart," and the site of a military encampment.

PROVINCIAL FORTS	NOTES	LOCATION	STATUS
*Page reference in above sources	*Description	*Municipality or township & County; where possible to determine approx location, 7.5 minute quad map name is given	*May include: National Register listing; site marker; in-depth studies performed; excavation performed; potential for archaeological integrity; etc.
The Supply Act of 11/55 authorized a provincial defense system. It called for a defense fund administered by 7 commissioners which could be used to pay and maintain troops, & to build and garrison forts. The commissioners named by the act were James Hamilton & John Mifflin (members of the Governor's Council) & Isaac Norris, Benjamin Franklin, Joseph Fox, John Hughes, & Evan Morgan (members of the Assembly; see Hunter p. 185, 198.) The following 4 entries, located in original Northampton County were forts planned by the Commission and built north of the Blue Mountain.			
Fort Allen (Hunter pp. 233-259; Montgomery vol. 1, pp. 184-224; Stotz, <u>Outposts</u> , pp. 106-107.)	Built 1/56; garrisoned by provincials until 1761. Stockade 125 x 50 feet containing 3 houses, a well and 2 swivel guns. See copy of Ben Franklin's plan.	Weissport, Carbon Co. See quad Leighton & attached copies of contemporary woodcut and fort plan.	PHMC markers for Ft Allen (Rte 209) and its well (opposite the fort) in Weissport. Built under Ben Franklin's immediate supervision; Gov. Morris considered it one of the 3 most important posts E of the Susquehanna. Served as a base for Indian negotiations.



Divergent road traces. Photo by the author.

While there were other Forbes Road fortifications that were larger than Fort Dewart, and may still possess archeological integrity, no other such site retains as much above-ground integrity. The features and overall integrity of the Rhor's Gap/ Fort Dewart segment appear to make it eligible for the National Register. Pivotal to this assessment is the uncompromised natural setting and strategic historic value of Rhor's Gap, and the unique survival of the Fort Dewart ramparts, which, together with the roadbed, constitute a considerable resource. In terms of its visible integrity and strategic importance, The Rhor's Gap/Fort Dewart segment of Forbes Road ranks as one of the two or three most significant surviving portions of the entire route.

The products of the overall French and Indian War survey will enable the first systematic approach to the preservation of Pennsylvania's French and Indian War resources. The BHP mapped resource locations directly on its archeological resource maps, giving most of these potential sites environmental review protection for the first time, and helping to fulfill an important gap in the BHP's responsibilities under state and national historic preservation legislation. Finally, use of the computer medium grants flexibility to efficiently update resource chart entries without having to recreate the entire survey document, making it a living survey inventory through ongoing entry of new data.

For archeologists, the survey and inventory should be useful in seeking funding for site testing and excavation. Such funding is scarce, and the application process to private foundations is highly competitive. Use of the survey, inventory, and mapping of fort sites should enhance and expedite the preparation of grant applications. The BHP hopes it will be especially helpful in demonstrating context and formulating research questions. The fort charts show at a glance where specific fort references can be

found in principal secondary works. The charts and cross-referenced maps can be used to quickly quantify the types of forts about which the least is known, or which stand the highest probability for archeological integrity. The survey lends itself to prioritizing archeological testing and excavation.

Despite the wealth of data synthesized in the survey, its shortcomings need to be recognized. The map locations which the BHP indicated for sites should be considered approximate and as starting points for further investigation, planning, and protection. In the principal use for the survey maps, conducting historical and cultural impact reviews under

state and federal preservation regulations, the sites indicated should in most instances be considered "high probability areas." In the past, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission archeologists have had mixed success in finding exact locations for some forts in the field, even with the combined tools of land survey records and contemporary descriptions, coupled with surface collection, ground-penetrating magnetic survey and deep sub-surface testing.

Nevertheless, the survey will be an important preservation planning tool because of the context and systematic planning approach it has provided for the fragile resources from this highly significant and formative period of history. The BHP thanks the National Park Service for its support for the project, especially Katherine Stevenson and Randall Cooley for their involvement. The BHP welcomes inquiries about the project and the sharing of information with other states and public agencies.

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